

Transcription: William Taylor

Today is Thursday, May 13th, 2010. My name is James Crabtree. I'll be interviewing Mr. William Taylor. Mr. Taylor is at his home in Abilene, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us and I guess the best question to start with is just to tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the Navy.

William Taylor: Oh, I was born into a family of means in 1926. In 1930, my father lost his business and we were poor as far as the rest of my life is concerned at home. Dad moved a great deal, looking for work, and when he found a job, in those days we didn't commute. We moved. And some of the moves were made that people wouldn't understand today. I remember one time we moved across the street because the rent was 50 cents a month less across the street than it was where we were living. I changed schools approximately 20 times the first eight years I went to school. In those days, I guess we were more intelligent then. We finished school in 11 years instead of 12. That's a joke we pull on our grandchildren nowadays. They know more after the 4th Grade than we did when we finished high school. I finished high school in a little town with one stoplight, Hamlin. It's about 45 miles northwest of Abilene. I finished high school there in 1943. During my senior year, I took a test for a V-12 program if I'm not mistaken is what it was called. It was a naval air cadet program, and during the time I was taking those tests, I needed to make a trip over to Sweetwater which is another 40 miles or so west of Abilene. Finishing high school, my mother and my little sister boarded the little train that came through Hamlin, which we called the Doodlebug, of course, a diesel engine and one car. It took us 40 miles over to connect with the Santa Fe and we headed for California. My father had already been out there with his brother several months before working in shipyards. They were both carpenters, so they were building forms for concrete ships, which I found out many young people don't even realize that a concrete ship would float.

That's right. That's pretty fascinating and something I think is kind of just exclusive to World War II period.

William Taylor: Yes, because our iron and steel was in such short supply that they could use rebar and concrete which we had plenty of, and build these ships, and they were powered by a seagoing tug ship, tugboats, and they could transport quite a volume of petroleum products to places that we needed.

So where was that in California? In southern California?

William Taylor: That was yes, in San Diego.

So you were there when it was really a boom town because of the war.

William Taylor: Oh yes, my mother and I went to work just immediately within a week of being there. We went to work at Consolidated Valt, wherever they were building B-24 bombers, and these B-24 bombers were rolling off the line, one every two hours.

Wow.

William Taylor: There was no telling how many thousands of people working there and they had three shifts going around the clock, and well there would be four shifts because we got one day a week off, and it took four shifts to cover that.

To go back just a little bit, sir, I know you said you graduated from high school in '43. Do you remember where you were on Dec. 7th of 1941 when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

William Taylor: Yes, we were on our way to church and I lived out in the country near Hamlin, and someone brought the news of the attack to church because there were very few radios in the community, and this is something that young people don't understand. In a community, that surrounded one little country school which took in about a three- to six-mile radius around the school, maybe there would be three radios. They were battery powered, and my uncle happened to have one, and the community gathered at his house on Saturday nights especially to listen to the Grand Ol' Opry and when Joe Louis was fighting, and we have people now who don't even know who Joe Louis was.

Yeah, it's sad. That's true.

William Taylor: By the way, are you in the age group of World War II?

No, I'm 33.

William Taylor: Oh, you're 33, OK.

But I'm a veteran myself and I love history and I read a lot about it and so I certainly know who Joe Louis was and how important radio was in that time period, and that sort of thing.

William Taylor: Do we have time for a little short side story?

Yes sir, this is your interview.

William Taylor: This is something young people won't understand. These radios had to have antennas that were quite long, and usually it was a pole attached to the end of a house, and then another one I guess by the barn someplace, maybe 100 or 200 feet away, and at the bottom of this pole we had a little pool dug out where on Saturday morning, the children could start carrying water from the well or the horse trough or whatever was available, and pouring in that to make sure we had a good ground, and we'd get a good sound that night. And I'm not even familiar with where the stations came from. But there was no local stations in those days. When I started high school, there was one local station over in Sweetwater that had a program where boys and girls could call in and have kins requested for their friends, and we liked to call them girlfriends and boyfriends in those days. The economy was still trying to recover from the Depression of '29 and '30. That when our father lost his company.

What had your father done before the Depression hit?

William Taylor: Dad went to World War I, and when he came home he had a partner, I don't know where they learned it or whether they just jerked themselves up by their bootstraps, but they piped Big Frame for gas, natural gas. After World War I, the city, the biggest frame which is about 100 miles, you're a Texan, you know where it is -

Yes sir.

William Taylor: He and his partner started a little company and they did that. Immediately following that, he developed a company where he did asbestos insulation, and when they were building the Kosden refinery which is a small refinery, was a small refinery outside of Big Spring, now, it's quite a large refinery now, he gained some more stability in his company then and when that refinery was finished, they moved to Sweetwater to build the Guff Refinery, which was west of Sweetwater. During the winter of probably, let's see, I was about 4, so it would be in about 1930, he became ill during the winter and had to go to the hospital and had pneumonia. In those days, insurance and the things that has to be put forth before you can even get a contract now in business, they did that on a handshake in those days.

So you were in Big Spring then when the Depression hit? Your family?

William Taylor: We were in Big Spring or in '29, I don't remember a whole lot of '29, I was 3. And the reason I remember dad working at the Guthrie refinery, was he went to work very early in the morning, it was still dark, and of course bread was not, he didn't go to the store and get bread and slice it in the morning. Biscuits were cooked every meal. And the old gas stoves in those days, you lit the oven through a hole in the bottom, and mother had put, and I imagine it was lard rather than, because either butter or lard was the oil that they used for cooking, and she put that in a pan in the oven to melt while she was making the biscuits, and she reached in to get that with a cup towel rather than a holder, and flames were so hot coming through that little hole that it caught that cloth on fire. I was sitting on a stool right next to the stove because it was in the winter time, and when she brought that out, it was just near right over my head and dad reached out and just squeezed the flame out and it tilted that and the grease came down on top of my head and my back. When the doctor's office was open later in the day from stories that I get, I was taken to the doctor and they dressed my back, but little boys, the mothers used Brilliantine on our hair, and it was quite greasy, so it wasn't noticed that I also had burns in the roof, the top of my head, and when I complained about it a day or two later, mother said when she started to part the hair to see what was wrong with the top of my head, it just came out. I still carry a scar a little larger than a silver dollar, and it's on the back of my head now rather than it being on top when my pit crew had moved the scar. That's the reason I remember when dad was building the Guthrie refinery. We were at that time a two-car family, which was unusual.

Oh definitely.

William Taylor: One was an Essex, the other was a Dodge. They were both touring cars. We had the spares up in the front fenders and sometimes we would have as many as four, five radios in our livingroom.

That's something. Then sir, to jump back to Pearl Harbor again, you were in high school and you learned that the nation had been attacked. Did you think at that point that sometime you would be going to war yourself?

William Taylor: Oh no, I was a sophomore and in two years, the United States could do anything, you know. It was something that we didn't even think a great deal about as far as me going to the service.

What about your father, was he old enough that that wasn't a concern that he would be called up?

William Taylor: Oh, he was old enough by that time that he wouldn't be called up, and he had a family of three children.

And how old were your siblings?

William Taylor: My sister was five years older than me, and my little sister was two years younger.

OK, so you were the only boy.

William Taylor: Yes, I was the only boy. Mother had five children, and there were two girls died before I was born. My family lost two children in a period of two months. The older girl was about 2 and she died of dehydration, which wouldn't happen today, and the other one was a crib death, which does happen today.

I don't think people realize how often that used to occur back then, because even my father had two older brothers whom I never knew that died young. One died from appendicitis when he was about 15, and then my grandparent's first child, which was born sometime I guess in the early 1930s, he died when he was only about a year old from tetanus. Apparently he had stepped on a rusty nail or something along those lines. A lot of things that today would be easily caught and prevented that back then just wasn't possible.

William Taylor: Oh yes. The progress made in nearly any field from World War II to now is just unbelievable. Of course, that is a long period of time. It doesn't seem very long to a young person, I suppose, the progress made, in fact you don't even remember when there wasn't Scotch tape.

That's right.

William Taylor: And this is an illustration that people in my age group use of young people when they talk about something has always been here, it's always been this way or something, and we use that as an illustration. Well we've always had Scotch tape. No we haven't. And I suppose our parents, my parents probably saw more progress in their lifetime than we did because when they were born, there were horses and buggies, and before they passed away, we landed on the moon.

Exactly, that's right.

William Taylor: That was probably the most progress in the shortest length of time would be in my parents time.

I think that's probably right. Well sir, when you went to San Diego with your family, was that the first time you had been away from Texas?

William Taylor: Yes, that was the first time I'd been away from Texas.

Tell us what your thoughts and your memories were of San Diego.

William Taylor: It was quite a city because I came from a one stoplight town, and just the train ride, when I got aboard the train in Sweetwater, trains were so crowded that even the space between cars was used. I stood with my back against the ballast between cars with one foot in one car and one in the other from Sweetwater to El Paso. You were not allowed but one suitcase and they had to be small, there was no large luggage allowed even. And standing room, people were just jammed in trains like sardines, and at El Paso I finally got to move up in the aisle near where my mother and little sister had received a seat. There were men in those days that would get up and let a lady sit down.

When you got to San Diego, where in town were you living? Do you remember the area?

William Taylor: Yes, the little town was called Linda Vista. Of course for the war effort there, they had to make room for people moving from the inland out to where these plants were, and the government probably paid for having a mountaintop scraped off to fill the little valleys and creeks and things and they built a bedroom city about 8 miles from Consolidated Valt, and these houses were built out of plywood and they were built with construction nails that had two heads. So here was a nation that was even thinking about, and we were in bad straits at that time, we were still losing the war, and yet they were thinking about the days when these buildings would have to be torn down. This was something that of course I didn't think about at the time, but since I'd become a little older and I hope wiser, I'd think about here's a nation losing the war, but they were building houses for people to live in that would work in what we called war plants. And they even built them with double-headed nails so they would be easy to tear down and put permanent housing. And Linda Vista is now a permanent bedroom city out of San Diego. My wife and I visited there about 10 or 15 years ago when I was going to show her where I lived during the war.

Did you recognize much of the area?

William Taylor: Oh no, that street is not even there. The only thing I recognized that we climbed what we would call here in Texas a mountain. It's a little hill out there. I imagine it was 1,000 feet above the city, and while we lived there, there was gun emplacements even behind our house, and they had these little gas-filled balloons that took cables up a couple of thousand feet in the air, and those were just thick all over when it became dark. These were near gun emplacements and the Marines or Army or whoever was in charge of those would let these up in the air in case we were attacked by low flying planes, these cables would take care of them. Those were the one that was nearest us was about 200 feet from the back of our house. We could stand there and look over and see San Diego and it was dark. When the war was over, there was a great celebration and I happened to be ashore at the time, and we went back to the back of the house and looked down on San Diego when they turned on the lights, and it was brilliant. It was just something that you dream about.

When you were out there in San Diego, at what point was it you decided to go in the Navy or were you drafted?

William Taylor: I was drafted. While I was there, I was called up for this V-12 program and made a trip to Los Angeles, and what they were doing was just what we called back in those days, they'd put a mirror before our face and if it fogged up, we were alive and they would take us. But it was a little bit more than that. The doctors would ask you questions to see if anything had happened to your health since you got your examination back in high school, and a doctor

asked me a question and I said I don't know, Doc, I don't know what that is. He said, have you ever had a spinal tap? And I told him in the appointment that I did when I was about 12 years old, and this man that I called an old man, which was probably your age, laid his head down on the desk and beat it with his fist and straightened up, and of course time was of the essence in those days, and he said son, how did you ever get this far? I said no one ever asked me that question before. He looked back in the paperwork and found out about two months before then that autopsies had been done on fighter pilots that in training you would go up 10,000 feet, make a power dive straight toward the ground, and at 3,000 feet they would pull out, and the G's were such that everybody would black out. But your plane would be going up again and in I don't know how far, but 99.9% of pilots would come to and they could handle their plane again. Occasionally there would be one that would just fly a circle and fly the plane right into the ground. They found out in some autopsies that these men had had spinal taps and the place where the needle went in, the cartilage would be just a little bit thicker there, and that would cause an extra pinch on the spinal cord and keep a person from coming to in time to control their airplane. So they quit taking us.

So that washed you out of that program.

William Taylor: Yes, that washed me out of that program. They sent me back to San Diego. I was too near 18 to go back into the aircraft factory, but jobs were plenty. I got a job as a shipping clerk at Montgomery Wards, and that's where I worked until I was drafted.

When you were drafted, and San Diego is a big Navy town, did you do your basic training right there in San Diego?

William Taylor: No, my basic training was in Farragut, Idaho. Just about the only other base they could've sent me to would've been near Chicago. It would've been further away. But the day I was drafted, the day I went to I think El Cajon, it's a little place that I went to for the examinations, and there was about 600 of us that day, and only about 9 or 10 of us were too small to be Marines and they stamped us Navy.

I know that San Diego for a long time had a training spot for the Navy. Was there a Navy training facility there at that time?

William Taylor: Yes, there was men that were sent from other parts of the United States to San Diego.

Did you ever find out why they would send you halfway across the country? It just seems like at war time with the restrictions on travel and everything that wouldn't have made a lot of sense to not let you train in San Diego.

William Taylor: Either that, or at that time, we didn't know it at the time, but they were preparing men for the invasion of Iwo Jima, and that's the reason they wanted Marines. They would take us up to the desk after our physical and everything two at a time, and there was a man that weighed 180 pounds and I weighed about 116 pounds, and the sergeant didn't even look up. He'd call names, the paperwork would come up for two names he'd call, we'd stand in front of the desk and he would ask how much we weighed, and he asked me, I told him, and then he asked the other man, and he weighed 180 pounds, so he had two stamps. He just grabbed 'em and pointed him, Marines, pointed to me, Navy, and there was only either 9 or 10, very few of

us, were that small. In fact, I looked like I was about 13 or 14 years old. I finished high school one month after I was 17.

What high school did you go to there?

William Taylor: Hamlin.

Oh, back in Texas, OK. You were already out of high school when you got to San Diego.

William Taylor: That's the reason dad went ahead and left us at home so I could finish high school there. I'd moved enough in schools, and I remember my parents saying if I moved to California, my little sister of course was in school in California, and I didn't even know it until a couple of years ago when I was visiting with her, when she passed a certain age, I don't remember what it was, she went to school a half a day and worked in an aircraft factory half a day. There was something that was strange, I mean thinking about it now, but we were from a farm community and we were given responsibilities that were actually beyond what our age was. She was an inspector and she was 16 years old. She inspected wiring in a fighter plane. On the B-24's that I worked on, I worked in what they called the vertical wing buck section. It was the middle section of the wing where the four motors were mounted, and I went to school for about a week to learn how to sharpen drill bits without a jig, just by holding them on a grindstone, and learning how to drill a hole very straight where it was absolutely a 90-degree angle. And I hadn't been working there oh, just a couple of weeks or three, when I was given the responsibility of drilling 32 holes that held 16 brackets that held 2,000 horsepower motors, and these little holes were about the size of a pencil lead, and through about five or six drillbits, graduated sizes, I would go from that little tiny hole to 5/8-inch hole, and then I would countersink it without a jig to where a rivet would fit flat on that, and they would use icebox rivets. These were super cold. The riveters would handle them with big insulated gloves on.

What was the reason for having them so cold?

William Taylor: It had to do with the strength that it would change the structure of the rivet from with the heat that would be generated when they would brad these into the brackets, the heat would change, of course, I was 17 years old. I had one that I carried in my pocket that I could use to make sure that the holes were the right size and that I didn't make a mistake in getting this countersunk part where it would be flat. I had two hours to do that, and I didn't think anything about it then because I was accustomed to being given work that was, you know, on a farm you were given a job and you did it. You didn't even ask why. Well, yes we did, we asked why, but usually it was because I said so was the answer we got. But that was a little bit of what responsibility was given to very, very young people in building this war machine that had to be built.

And tell us what it was like when you finally departed to go to Navy basic training.

William Taylor: Yes, we were told to bring a very small suitcase, strong enough that we could send our clothes back home. We were told to bring two changes of underwear, and no outer clothes change, bring your toilet articles, very few, and we boarded a train at San Diego, and five days later they dumped us out at Farragut, Idaho, because we stayed on sidings a lot. Tracks were used a great deal, so you spent time on the sidings so other trains could pass. Then when we arrived there, immediately we were taken to a building that looked like warehouses to me, and I never saw so many naked men in all my life. We were told to strip, put all of our clothes in

that little bag, and given a tag with our name and address on it and throw it on the pile. I'm writing a book that's covering some of the same things that we're talking about, and it dawned on me that mothers all over the nation were receiving these little bags that came, and clothes that men or boys, we weren't men yet, we were boys, that had been worn for five or six days, and the odor must've been something else when they opened those, and here was for some of these women, the only thing that they would ever see of their sons again, was the stinking shoes and clothes that were gonna have to stand alone. But that was just a thought of an old man.

That's a good point, sir. And so at that time, when you were in training, did you know what your specialty was going to be yet?

William Taylor: No, we were being taught to take care of our clothes, to store them in a very small space, and to follow orders without question, and to learn how to march, get in halfway decent physical condition, and do what we were told, and of course there was competition between companies and this sort of thing that made it a little bit more interesting and where we could compete with someone.

I've always been told, sir, that in Navy basic training that two of the biggest things are learning how to swim and then also being able to fight fires on a ship. Did you do a lot of training in terms of those two things?

William Taylor: Not in boot camp. In boot camp, the lake near Farragut, Idaho, was so cold that three or four minutes was all that a person could stand so there was no swimming there. And we didn't swim, I don't remember, I don't know, we may have swam in boot camp, too, because there was an area that I remember that we would put on a Kapot glass jacket which was nearly as heavy as we were because it was soaked and never had time to dry, and we would climb onto a high diving board, jump off with a helmet on, and our bathing suit and this Kapot glass jacket, and we were supposed to swim across the pool and get out. What we actually did, we walked on the bottom until we got over there.

That was a pretty shallow pool.

William Taylor: Because of the weight that we were carrying. And then to determine whether we were a Class A, B, or C swimmer, there was a distance that we had to swim. That probably was in boot camp because I can't imagine that happening in a training school. I was a Class C swimmer because I just barely knew how to stay on top of the water. I think I had to swim 50 yards for a Class C swimmer. A Class C swimmer should have help from an A. B swimmers could take care of themselves. Then in later training schools, we got the feel of that.

How long was it, sir, before you reached the USS Grimes?

William Taylor: I was in boot camp six weeks, and then we were in an outgoing unit over in the valley east of San Francisco in Oakland, and we did very little at that place except cook in the sun. It was so very hot, the asphalt was so soft and it would stick to our shoes. When we went on liberty, we ate, rested, and went on liberty there, waiting to be assigned somewhere. And we would have to go on liberty in a world uniform from 100 degree heat and pea coat with us because it gets cold in Frisco, and those of us that had any thought at all of dating someone, we had a uniform left in the cleaners over there and we would go in and change into that. No girl would get within yards of a guy that had a uniform of whites over in the valley. But from the day we were gone on liberty it was dress blues and a pea coat and those were made out of wool.

By the way, we found out that wool can be washed, and really good wool can be washed. If you put it under your bunk and flatten it out real nice, it comes out looking pretty good.

What was your specialty, ultimately?

William Taylor: When we were sent to a unit where we would get advanced training, the group that I was with was sent to Carlotta Island, San Diego, and we were a boat company. Of course we were still in training physically. We ran just miles and miles in sand, and in the boat training we'd run those boats up on the nice, smooth beach and backed 'em off and go back like we were bringing troops from a ship into an island.

So were you driving some of those amphibious vehicles or were you part of the crew?

William Taylor: I was part of the crew, and each man was tried out in each of the spots. There was the coxswain that drove the boat, there was two deck hands to lower the ramp in front and also man two 30-caliber machinegun turrets behind the coxswain, and we also had to during that training we had 200-horse grey marine diesel engines in them, and in those days, diesel engines were not as well controlled as they are today, and they would run away with you if they reached a certain temperature, they would keep gaining rpm's until they would fly apart. We were trained, the two deck hands and of course the coxswain had to go through this also, we would take the valve cover off and reach in and get a hold of the valve arms and hold them open in hot oil, and we didn't have gloves to wear either. There were certain ones that would actually kill the engine if you held the valves open. We had to go through that practice a time or two in order to know how to kill an engine because it would blow up and kill everybody on the boat, and they would hold 27 men which is a platoon, I think, of men that you would land, and after learning how to do this on the sand, we were taken where there was coral and rock because not all the beaches that we landed on were nice, loose sand.

One thing I read, sir, about those amphibious craft was that it was very important to not get stuck on the beach, to be able to go I guess straight in and be able to back straight out, and if you got turned to the side, I forget what the terminology was -

William Taylor: They called it breaching.

Breaching, yes sir, breaching. How did your crew learn not to breach when you go onto the beach?

William Taylor: We practiced that, but there's sometimes there just wasn't any way. The ocean had something to do with it, and if we breached a boat, we immediately became Marines. We grabbed our machineguns and all the ammunition we could carry, we went ashore, and we actually did some of this, dug us a foxhole and we took some commando training, not as much as Marines did, but enough that if we became a Marine we at least had a chance.

And then once after the battle or area had cleared out a little bit, then how would you get the vessel unbreached? You'd have to have a special equipment or another vehicle pull you out?

William Taylor: Men could push 'em out. These ____ were quite heavy. They weighed about 36,000 pounds, but if you had a little bit of water to help you and enough men, they could be pushed back where they could be turned around. Of course, I was fortunate enough, the ship I was aboard, we never made an initial landing. We took replacement troops into Iwo Jima on

about the 12th or 13th day, and of course we did, I had transferred out of the boat crew into ship's company. When we finally got aboard our ship, of course after our training at Grenada, we were a boat company, and we were then a long train ride all the way up to Puget Sound where our ship was being built, and they were still building on it when we took it to sea.

Tell us what you remember about the Grimes in particular.

William Taylor: The Grimes was like all APA's, amphibious personnel attack ships, and cargo ships were built exactly alike as far as the hull was concerned. They were built out of quarter inch steel. They were approximately 456 feet long and 56 feet wide, and the wheelhouse stood approximately 56 feet above the water. They were a very top-heavy ship. We only drew 22 feet of water. And in a storm which was one of our most dangerous things I guess that happened to our ship during the war, we were in a typhoon east of China, and a ship of that type would only lean 37 degrees. 38 degrees, it'll turn over on its side. And we were steaming into a storm there that waves were solid hitting the wheelhouse, and the danger there was that a wave would go over the top and knock the stack off and then water would go down the stack and kill the engines. Then the next danger was you can't steam forward into a storm. You've got to turn around somewhere. You've got to run aground, and of course through your history you know that the deepest body of ocean in the world is near where we were, and six miles deep there east of China, and there's mountains also there in the ocean, and with waves as high as they were, there was a danger of being in a trough if you went across one of these mountains, and you'd rake the bottom of your ship out.

Was the ship fully loaded with troops at that point, too?

William Taylor: No, we didn't have troops aboard. It was just ship's company and the boat company was all that was aboard. It took about 325 people to run the ship, and there was about 125 men and officers in the boat company. When we first went to sea, the boat company was mostly standing gun watches, which is boring, and I was on one of the forward mounts and I could look back at the bridge and I was thinking the brains of this thing is up there on that bridge, and we scuttlebutt got round that there's some men that was aboard ship in ship's company that wanted to be in the boat company, and vice versa. So I exchanged with a quartermaster, and you do realize the difference in a Navy quartermaster and a Marine quartermaster. So I did get to go to work on the bridge, and one time of course our messages were all in our brain. We didn't write down messages that were going from the bridge to the captain or wherever they need to be. I took one quite long message to the captain and he asked me, says Taylor, are you sure? And I told him the affirmative, that I would with his permission, I would check. Of course there's all this protocol stuff that you go through. And he said no, no, you're right. I just wanted to know if you were confident that your message was right. And he had a spreadsheet on his desk, and he asked me if I knew what he was doing. I made a guess. It was nearly correct. He said that's very good, Taylor. You're very close. And would you like to be one of my aids? Aboard ship, the captain's aid was a brown-nose job, and with my lack of knowledge and stupidity or whatever, I asked him if I had time to think about it. You got three days. And I turned it down, which was probably one of the worst mistakes I made while I was in the service. He said OK, that's your choice, Taylor, but this one is not your choice. You will be my messenger at general quarters. So anytime we had an emergency, I was at the captain's elbow then to the end of the war. When Captain Smith was transferred off the ship and we received a civilian captain from the merchant marines, a Captain Ferguson, which we had two of the best captains I guess any unit could ever wish to have, and if we can regress a little bit – when the boat company came aboard ship, the captain, I don't know whether it was the same day

or not, but it was very shortly after we got aboard, the crew was 5 to 2, go to the forward deck and that would be right in front of the wheelhouse and he had the officers on each side of him, and he welcomed us aboard. Then he made a statement that endeared him to the crew. He told us that said you men down there were made gentlemen by the teachings of your parents, more than likely your mother, and he waited a few beats, and then he said these gentlemen standing by me were made gentlemen by an act of Congress. And I don't know what that said to the officers, but the crew, that was something else. And Captain Smith was a very wise, learned man. We were in on our ___ cruise just supposed to be safe water between San Francisco and Hawaii, and I happened to be on watch and we had a torpedo wake from starboard to port across the bow, and the CB's had finished his emergency bedroom which was just right behind the wheelhouse, and the only time I ever touched an officer to wake him, I touched the captain that night. I just rushed in and didn't grab him or anything, I just touched his shoulder and gave him what had happened, and he says grab my clothes, son, follow me. And he came onto the wheelhouse in his skivvies, took control of the ship, and gave an order to the helmsman to steer a certain degree, hard right rudder and come up on a certain degree, and the quartermaster, which was on watch then because he'd taken my place, a quartermaster steered the ship and also kept the log, and he also handled the enunciator, and he wanted flank speed ahead, and he then went out on the port wing and looked down and says Taylor, if we're lucky, the next one will pass right out there. And he had no more got it out until our bow watch, of course they had headsets and mikes that they, he reported that we had a torpedo wake dead ahead. And it passed right down the side of our ship when we were looking over at it. And he told me to go tell the quartermaster to log it that it had missed us by 12 feet. If it had been up to me, I would've said it missed us about 4 inches, because when you are looking down from 56 feet, 12 feet sure looks small. But we started, he broke radio silence that night and we had I think it was 9 ships behind us. He must have been the ranking officer in the group because we were the lead ship and we were all getting the same training, and he just broke radio silence, told 'em what had happened, said we're steering, there was a coded message what kind of course to steer. It was a zig-zag course, and he talked, we'll get back together in the morning. Just plain, no code or anything. And so we, here was a Japanese captain of that submarine had probably committed hari-kari because he had the opportunity, there was no war ships around us, he had the opportunity to sink ships, and kill thousands of men, and he missed. He missed twice. And we had no way of fighting back. We had no depth charges or anything. But the only thing we had was to get out of his way. That happened in the very early days of our shakedown of our ship.

And then at some point, sir, I know you mentioned Iwo Jima. Where you there? I know you said you did a landing later on. Were you able to see the initial shelling of that island?

William Taylor: No, not the initial shelling. We came in either the 12th or 13th day we brought in Army to replace some Marines that were left, and there was not very many of them left. I'm not sure from my memory, but it seems to me like we lost nearly half the initial landing force, but we were close enough that we could see these Japanese come out of their tunnels that they had built there, and they were still fighting men on the ground. But there was one cave that we watched from where we were and they would come out, they would move out a small gun, probably .31 caliber or maybe larger than that, but at one time they fired at our ship, and there was about four of us that had grabbed a coffee bucket and sat down and put our helmets on and binoculars laying on the rail of the ship. We were watching what was happening, and this happened right behind us, and we looked around and these little .31 caliber projectiles were nearly spent, but they just made dents in the steel, and I crawled over and grabbed a handful of 'em, four or five or six, took 'em to the captain and he gave us a [grimace sound] because we were on that side of the ship, but we did move out about another mile, and at night we ran the

patrol boats up and down between the ship and the island in order to keep swimmers from coming out and planting explosives on the ships.

All in all, how long were you aboard the Graves?

William Taylor: About 18 months I think.

Do you remember where you were when you learned that the war had ended? I guess you said you were back in San Diego.

William Taylor: I got back into San Diego in time to watch 'em turn on the lights, but I was in the Philippines when it was actually over.

How did you hear about it? Was it announced over the ship's intercom?

William Taylor: Yes, and just the noise that went up from the ships, there was many ships fired guns into the air, and our captain came on the intercom and said there will be no guns fired from this ship. However, we do have steam up and we can blow our horn. And if you want to pull on the chain that does that, get in line. And of course being in the position I was, it wasn't anything new to me to blow the horn. So we stayed out of the way while ship's company, men who had never even been on the bridge, they were on lower decks. There was one interesting thing that happened to me one time when the captain was on the bridge. Of course, they had little pockets for their binoculars on the front of the wheelhouse wall, and they were lined, well some material, probably took off some pool table somewhere. But anyway, the captain, in the presence of officers told me, he said Taylor, if you're ever on the bridge and I'm not here and you need a pair of binoculars, you can use mine if you just put my setting back on 'em. Here I was a seaman 1st class.

That's pretty cool.

William Taylor: In the presence of officers, ensigns, and above, even one commander which was our navigator, and I dared not look at an officer when he said that, and I'm sure I turned red from my feet all the way up.

Sounds like he was a good captain though.

William Taylor: He was, and that was one of his ways of awarding his messenger, and it didn't dawn on me at that age how important a position I held. I mean in his eyes at least I was dependable and had a good memory. Of course I lost all that now.

I don't think so. I think you've got a lot of good details, sir. It's been great hearing those. So when the war ended, how much longer was it before you left the Graves and got out of the Navy?

William Taylor: It was quite some months. Immediately we left from the Philippines to Japan, and I don't know how many ships were steaming up and down off the shore of Japan, but it was hundreds. There were ships, of course supply ships, and we took at least our ship, we landed the first Marines in Tokyo Bay. I'm probably not pronouncing it right, but we called it Yokasuki Naval Base, and our navigator and our captain studied charts going in because we did not trust their pilots to take us in. And our navigator, sad to say, was not a good navigator. He was not even a good officer. Many times I awakened him three times to come on watch.

Oh, that's pretty bad.

William Taylor: And at one time, the captain told him, he says go down and wait, Mr. – don't even remember his name – and tell them by order of the captain you are to stand there until he's on the floor.

Yeah, that's bad.

William Taylor: And I was verbally abused, to get out of his bedroom, but I just repeated by order of Captain Smith, I'm just standing here until your feet are on the floor. And taking us in, of course we were in general quarters, and he nearly blew our ship up going in. We were loaded with troops that were going to occupy Japan, and he made a turn to starboard when it should've been to port, and the captain just realized it immediately, ran over and took a bearing on each wing, pointed his finger at the navigator, go to your quarters, you're under arrest, plank feet astern, and of course I was standing by him, and by that time we had become so familiar that I just asked the captain what's our problem? And he told me how many hundreds or thousands of yards, I don't know how the distance was, but a ship takes a long time to stop, and ahead of us there are mines on both sides of us. We are in a slip where a ship should wait, and he said if we get to the hand, put his hands apart and brought 'em together because that would bring the ones from the sides into us, and he looked at me and he said son, you've been a good messenger. Evidently we stopped the ship because I'm here. And we backed down and he took us the rest of the way in and we landed our troops. I did get to go tour with a work party, and got to walk through Yokasuki Naval Base, and then on another work party I got ashore and we walked about 15 miles. There was the most beautiful road out of Yokasuki Naval Base. It was made out of caliche, and it was as smooth as a tabletop and it was done by hand because they did not have the equipment to do that sort of thing, and we were given orders, we were told about this road, and we were given orders never to walk, they said you walk sign uphill on both sides of the road. The local people used that trail, and we were given orders to treat these people with respect, to respect their shrines that were built along the roads, and if we met anyone on a trail, to step aside and let them pass. Captain Smith was a good man along with being a good captain.

How were the Japanese people towards you? Were they friendly? Were they aloof?

William Taylor: They ignored us. They looked straight ahead or down at the ground, and we saw only old people and very young children. We saw no young people, we saw no troops. They were all somewhere else. And we were impressed with the way they used their land to raise food. You'd be going down a trail and by a bank that was nearly perpendicular, and there would be little places dug out in this and one plant planted in there, and of course the odor was something else because they used human feces as fertilizer. But the space was scarce that they used every space you could think of to grow food.

When the war was over and you finally got out, did you go back home to Texas at that point?

William Taylor: Yes, we took our ship around through Guadalcanal and took it to a base up on the east coast to be put in mothballs, and I took a train from there, or I took a bus inland to a train, and we were told when this train stops, you get aboard. Whether there's a seat or not, you get aboard because it only stops for so many seconds, and we did get aboard and we bought our tickets from a conductor walking up and down, and when we got up to speed, we were passing cars on the highway and I asked one of the conductors how fast we were going, and he says oh,

something like 110, 115 mph. And it was on a train that was taking us from the east coast to the big city in Louisiana.

Baton Rouge? New Orleans?

William Taylor: New Orleans. See where my memory has gone. I have trouble with recalling things that I know.

Sure. Well then sir, did your folks make a decision at that point when the war ended to come back to Texas to leave California?

William Taylor: Oh yes, they were already back to Texas before I got out of the service. What kept me in so long, we were in San Diego when we found out we were voted one of the best ships with the best moral and best food and they wanted us to be one of the two ships to bring the last combat Marines home from Japan. Our replacements were in San Francisco, which would've been a five-day voyage from San Diego to San Francisco. Most of us in ship's company except just new recruits that had been brought aboard just straight from boot camp, we even had officers come aboard that had the only voyage they'd ever made was out to Honolulu and back, but they told us we were needed in Japan to bring these last combat Marines back, and we didn't have time to do this other. We got out on points then. When we got to Japan, the captain came back to the ship, oh, he got into a pile of boats just as quick as he could to get us in position to take these troops on and found out it'd be three months before they came back. We were put on a mission to go to Wakepelun and bring beer back, and we made that trip three times before we actually got our troops and were headed home. One of the funny things that happened when we found out these new officers were coming aboard, we all went down to ship's store and bought new clothes, two new pair, and we stenciled our name on them and we got new hats that we put a square around our head so the officers wouldn't be able to tell the difference in us and boot camp boys that just came aboard. We I guess just one of the things that we did as a protest or something. I was standing march one night and the ocean was beautiful, moon on just glass-like water, and one of these new officers came out and asked me if I had ever seen the moon on Diamond Head Point which was the only place he'd ever been, and I thought about it for a little bit and I said I really don't, but I've seen sun shine on Mount Suribachi, and he turned around and walked away. Of course we did our job, we were considered old salts by that time, but we still acted dumb as we could around these new officers. And it was a giggle we got. We all had our hair cut off and all these sort of goodies, but that was just one of the little funny things that happened after the war was over.

Well sir, I want to thank you really for letting us interview you today. I know Commissioner Patterson is a veteran and myself, but just everybody here at the Land Office is very appreciative of your service and your sacrifice for our nation.

William Taylor: Your welcome.

It's an honor and like I mentioned before we started, we'll make copies of this onto CD's for you that we'll send you in a few weeks, and then also when you get those if you have any pictures or anything that you want us to put on our web site or put in your file, let me know and you can either mail 'em to us and we can scan 'em or if you have email or whatever, we'll figure out a way if you have any pictures to get 'em on our web site.

William Taylor: The only pictures we were allowed to have was what official Navy photographers took, and that was a picture of the ship, and those were rolled up in rolls so tight and I've been intending to take them and this will be my excuse to do it now, take 'em to a photographer's shop and they will treat them and get them straightened out to where maybe I can get a picture of that.

And get a copy, yes sir.

William Taylor: I appreciate the opportunity to do this.

Yes sir, well it's our honor, and we'll be in touch with you shortly, sir.

William Taylor: Thank you.

Thank you very much. Have a good day.

[End of recording]